



PRESS RELEASE

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Secretary Clinton Statement on Middle East Peace

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For 40 years, successive American administrations of both parties have opposed Israel's settlement policy. That is absolutely a fact.

And the Obama Administration's position on settlements is clear, unequivocal. It has not changed. And as the President has said on many occasions, the United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. Now, the Israelis have responded to the call from the United States, the Palestinians and the Arab world to stop settlement activity by expressing a willingness to restrain settlement activity. They will build no new settlements, expropriate no land, allow no new construction or approvals.

And let me just say this offer falls far short of what we would characterize as our position, or what our preference would be. But if it is acted upon, it will be an unprecedented restriction on settlements and would have a significant and meaningful affect on restraining their growth.

Let me take a step back because I want to put this into the broader context. I will offer positive reinforcement to the parties when I believe they are taking steps that support the objective of reaching a two-state solution.

I will also push them as I have in public and in private to do even more. And in my report to the President last month, I talked about Israeli willingness to restrain settlement activity as a positive step.

In the same report, I praised President Abbas' leadership of the Palestinian Authority for their courage and the security measures on the West Bank. The steps being taken under President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayed are also unprecedented and we have never seen such effective security. I have on many occasions going back – as you know in Sharm El Sheikh - praised the accomplishments that the Palestinian Authority has demonstrated in building, training, and reforming their security forces.

I told Prime Minister Netanyahu that these positive steps on the part of the Palestinians should be met by positive steps from Israel - movement and access, operations by the IDF and on Israeli security arrangements on the West Bank. Israel has done a few things in that regard but they need to do much more. And President Abbas has shown leadership and determination on this issue and Israel should reciprocate.

I just want to clarify that what we are trying to achieve is a two-state solution with a state that represents the aspirations of the Palestinian people – the sovereignty and to have control over their own future, and provide the security guarantees to Israel for their own future. That is my goal. And when either party takes any steps that look like it moves us in the right direction – even if it is not what I would like or what I would like prefer - I'm going to positively reinforce that.

This is an opportunity for both sides to try to move forward together, to get into negotiations, and to realize the goal that many of us around this table have supported and worked for many years.